Dinjii Zhuh Ky'àa Yahdii

YAHDII IN THE NATIVE TRADITION: A GWICH'IN (DENE) STAR CHART



STAR GROUPS IN THE WHOLE-SKY **CONSTELLATION YAHDII**

Vitsì' 'his tail', Big Dipper

Tł'ohts'ajj Vanli' 'his left hand', a Leo (Regulus), o Leo (Subra)

Shreets'ajj Vanli' 'his right hand', β Tri, γ And (Almaak)

Tł'ohts'ajj Vigin 'his left arm', a general region of stars

Shreets'ajį Vigin 'his right arm', a general region of stars

Tł'ohts'ajj Vidzèe 'his left ear', α Gem (Castor), β Gem (Pollux)

Shreets'ajj Vidzèe 'his right ear', α Aur (Capella), β Aur (Menkalinan)

Vanch'àl 'his snout', Pleiades; also called Vantsih 'his nose' Vindee 'his eyes', ι Aur (Hassaleh), β Tau (Alnath)

Vikì' 'his head', all the stars comprising the eyes, ears, and snout/nose

Tł'ohts'ajj Vakwài' 'his left foot', α Boo (Arcturus), η Boo (Murphrid)

Shreets'ąįį Vakwài' 'his right foot', α Cyg (Deneb), γ Cyg (Sadr)

Tł'ohts'aji Vatth'an 'his left leg', a general region of stars

Shreets'aji Vatth'an 'his right leg', a general region of stars

Vizhin 'his body', 15 Lyn, o UMa (Muscida), h UMa (Alhaud IV), 36 UMa, θ UMa (Alhaud V), ι UMa (Talitha), к UMa, (Alkaphrah), 31 Lyn (Alsciaukat)

Vidrii 'his heart', 27 Lyn

Va'ohtsùu 'his bag', χ UMa (Taiyangshou), (Tania Australis), λ UMa (Tania Borealis)

Vatòo 'his walking stick/spear/staff', ε Leo (Algenubi), μ Leo (Rasalas), ζ Leo (Adhafera), γ1 Leo (Algieba), η Leo (Al Jabhah), o Leo (Subra), HIP 47310, τ 1 Hya (Ukdah I), τ 2 HYa (Ukdah II), α Hya (Alphard)

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Vatąjį 'his trail', Milky Way galaxy; also Są' Gwat'an Tąjį 'trail of stars'

A CONSTELLATION OF THREE MORNING STARS

Yeedàk Gahàajil 'they went/rose far up', δ Boo (Thiba), ε Boo (Izar), α Boo (Arcturus); also called K'iidàk Gahàajil 'they went/rose straight up'; or Vành Oozhrii 's/he is naming the morning'

POLARIS (NORTH STAR)

Zheetl'an Dha'ajj '(star) in the middle of the sky', a UMi (Polaris)

Stars depicted as seen from Fort Yukon, Alaska (66.5675° N, -145.256389° W) on March 15 @ 10:30 p.m. local time.

Yahdii is a Gwich'in Dene (Athabascan) constellation that spans more than 143° across the sky. Yahdii is composed of 16 smaller groups of stars named using Gwich'in body-part terms. He also has a single-strapped bag (va'ohtsùu) on his left side and holds a walking stick/spear/medicine staff (vatòo) in his left hand. The Milky Way (vatạji) is his snowpacked trail that circles the world. Yahdii is crouched on all fours in a protective position over Earth. The lower groups of stars near the horizon (head, hands, feet, and cane) are considered closest to Earth, while the stars in the center of the sky (body, heart, and tail) are the farthest away. Late January through March present ideal times to observe this whole-sky constellation as Yahdii is directly centered in Alaska's evening sky. In autumn Yahdii's left side is partially below the evening horizon, becoming more centered toward morning. The apparent rotation of stars through the sky is referred to as Yahdii ahaa ('Yahdii is walking'), or Yahdii geeleenideekhaa ('Yahdii travels over the span').

Yahdii's identity is that of the ancient travelertransformer figure named Ch'iteehàakwaji ('he started out paddling among things') who went on a journey around the world to make Earth a safer

and more useful place for humans. During his journey he invented important Gwich'in technology and transformed dangerous ancient animals into their present forms. Ch'iteehàakwaii also removed a common language spoken by all things and made agreements with his transformed subjects, which established a core of taboos, laws, and protocols that shaped Northern Dene lifeways, social norms, and attitudes toward nature. He invented important Gwich'in technology and worked with all things on Earth, as symbolized on the poster by the images distributed around the constellation.

Ch'iteehàakwaii was the first dazhan (medicine person) and the first person to go on a vision quest. He was an old man by the time he completed his worldwide journey. When he died his spirit was incarnated in the stars as Yahdii; he continues to watch over Earth as a world custodian, teacher, ally, gamekeeper, and the embodiment and distributor of medicine power. Yahdii's image depicts the ancient Traveler transforming into one of his animal helpers. Although Yahdii has a human body with an animal head and tail, the specific type of animal conceptualized in these features is unshared personal knowledge that corresponds

to an individual's own animal helper. Yahdii's heart (vidrii) is a dim sacred star identified as the point from which he animates himself and his embodied power to the universe. Finding his heart affirms that one is leading a life consistent with his teachings and it reflects knowledge of all that Yahdii was and continues to be.

The constellation of three morning stars called Yeedàk Gahàajil ('they went far up') is conceptually related to Yahdii as three spirits rising toward him. These stars (the lower star in Yahdii's left foot and the two beside it) are used to determine hunting activities at dawn. The handle of the Big Dipper (vitsi') points directly to these stars as they rise from the northeast horizon at dawn from mid-October to early December. The final star shown is Zheetł'an Dha'ąįį '(star) in the middle of the sky' (Polaris) located beneath Yahdii's right knee. For additional information see the references.

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